

## MEMORANDUM

### PLANNING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT CITY OF SANTA MONICA PLANNING DIVISION

**DATE:** July 13, 2009

**TO:** The Honorable Landmarks Commission

**FROM:** Planning Staff

**SUBJECT: 2125 Arizona Avenue, LC-09LM-001**  
Landmark Designation Application 09LM-001, 2125 Arizona Avenue, to determine whether the commercial property should be designated as a City Landmark.

PROPERTY OWNER: WISE and Healthy Aging  
APPLICANT: City of Santa Monica Landmarks Commission

#### **INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

This staff report presents analysis relevant to the commercial building located at 2125 Arizona Avenue. A Landmark Designation Application was filed by the Landmarks Commission on March 9, 2009. A Landmark Assessment Report has been prepared for the subject property by the City's historic resources consultant, PCR Services Corporation (Attachment A).

The subject property, also known as the Santa Monica Doctors Building, is situated on the northwest corner of Arizona Avenue and 22nd Street, between 22nd Street to the east, 21st Street to the west, Wilshire to the north, and Arizona Avenue to the south. The three-story reinforced concrete office building is located within the Orchard Tract 199, on Block 3, Lot 30. The lot includes the original three-story medical office building and parking lot. The subject property is bordered by multi-family housing to the north and west, single-family housing to the east, and St. John's Hospital to the south. Based on a site survey, early Sanborn Maps, and Los Angeles County Tax Assessor records, it appears that the original improvements to the subject property were made between 1950 and 1952.

#### Historic Resources Inventory Status

The subject property was originally surveyed in 1993 during Phase 3 of the City of Santa Monica's historic resource survey. At that time, it was given a National Register Status Code of 4S2 which meant at the time that the property may become eligible for the National Register as an individual property with more research.

## **PUBLIC NOTIFICATION**

Pursuant to SMMC Section 9.36.120, notice of the public hearing was mailed to all owners and residential and commercial tenants of property within a 300-foot radius of the project and was published in the *Santa Monica Daily Press* at least ten consecutive calendar days prior to the hearing. A copy of the notice is included as Attachment D.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Architectural Description

The three-story Santa Monica Doctors Building is a Streamline Moderne medical office building designed in 1946 and constructed during the early 1950s in Santa Monica. Character-defining features of the style include stucco exterior surfaces, emphasis on curvilinear walls and overhangs, projections above doorways and windows, wide eaves, casement windows, and flat roofs. The subject property has a rectangular plan and stepped massing, with the tiered third floor and penthouse stacked on top of the first and second floors. The building's siting on the parcel in relation to the street corner also reinforces its massing and Streamline curvilinear form.

The roof is flat with shallow coping at the roofline. Stylized wide curvilinear eaves extend a few feet beyond the primary south and east elevations. The building's horizontal composition is emphasized by bands of metal casement windows, and by decorative band courses below the projecting first- and second-story eaves, and on both the third-story, penthouse.

The building has a distinctive, curved corner entrance located at the southeast corner near the intersection of 22nd Street and Arizona Avenue. The primary recessed entrance at the corner has terrazzo stairs, curved corner windows, curved pilasters flanking the glass doors (a later alteration), a black pigmented glass door surround and two square recessed entry lights. The non-original double glass entry doors are flanked by fluted columns.

The decorative terrazzo entry flooring continues into the interior lobby. The entrance is covered by an original semi-circular canopy. The second-story above the primary entrance has four metal, multi-light transom windows above multi-light casement windows which are not original features of the building.

The primary east elevation facing 22nd street and the south elevation facing Arizona Avenue both have curvilinear exterior walls. Both of these elevations feature eight-light casement windows topped by four light transoms. A low curvilinear concrete planter mirrors the curving horizontal lines of the east and south elevations. The alignment of the windows, eaves and planters reinforce the building's horizontality.

The rear (west and north) elevations are flat stucco surfaces without ornamentation. Wide eaves wrap around the corners onto the rear elevations and extend a few feet before

terminating. The north elevation has a metal fire escape, non-original doors, original casement windows, some with transoms, and stringcourses above the first and second floors. The west elevation has double glass doors (a later alteration), casement windows, some with transoms, and awnings above some of the windows.

The building's exterior displays a high level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship and has relatively few alterations. The primary entrance's glass double-doors and handrail on the front steps are later additions. The original second floor glass block window above the primary entrance was replaced with three casement windows sometime between 1992 and 2008. The two doors on the north (rear) elevation and the double doors on the west (rear) are also later alterations.

Building permits indicate the interior has been substantially remodeled to accommodate later tenant improvements required by the changes in the needs of doctors and other tenants and improvements in medical technology, which is not uncommon in existing early to mid-twentieth-century medical office buildings.

#### Historic Associations: Medical Facilities in Santa Monica Pre- and Post WW-II

As discussed more fully in Attachment A, in the early twentieth century, the City of Santa Monica did not have public medical facilities. Articles in the *Los Angeles Times* from 1896 to 1897 described the City of Santa Monica's urgency to construct a receiving hospital to care for injured patients. The sick and injured were often nursed at private residences where doctors would make house calls. As the City of Santa Monica began to develop, medical facilities were desperately needed. The first hospital, the Santa Monica Bay Hospital, wasn't constructed until 1907. The brick Santa Monica Bay Hospital was located at 4th Street and Pacific and contained twenty-five modern rooms.

During the 1920's the *Los Angeles Times* featured many stories about the construction of proposed new hospitals in Santa Monica. In 1907 there was a plan to build a modern 200-bed hospital, to be named St. Luke's Hospital, on Pico Boulevard across the street from Santa Monica High School. However, St. Luke's Hospital was never constructed. Nineteen years later, there was a proposal to construct a new seven-story hospital on the site of Santa Monica's first hospital at 4th Street and Pacific in 1926, but the plans were never conceived. On July 26, 1926, the brick Renaissance Revival Santa Monica Hospital opened at 16th Street and Wilshire Boulevard.

As hospitals were proposed and constructed during the 1920's, the construction of medical office buildings also occurred. One of the earliest medical office buildings in Santa Monica was the Wilshire Medical Building constructed in 1924 at 317-335 Wilshire Boulevard. The Wilshire Medical Building was designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style by Paul R. Williams. Another medical office building constructed in Santa Monica was the Mission Revival Santa Monica Health and Wellness Center at 1525 Euclid Street.

The increased population in the post World War II period brought about a hospital shortage in Santa Monica. St. John's Hospital, the prominent five-story medical facility in the City of

Santa Monica, was opened in November 1942 by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth. As the population of Santa Monica grew, the demand for healthcare facilities also increased, so in June of 1949 St. John's began the construction of a new seven story \$2,300,000 North Wing addition.

In 1952 a *Los Angeles Times* article reported on the hospital bed shortage stating: "There should be 1200 beds for the 300,000 persons served by the two local hospitals (Santa Monica and St. Johns); but there are actually only 450 beds, a shortage of 750."

To fulfill the hospital bed shortage, other Post World War II medical facilities were constructed in Santa Monica and West Los Angeles, including the UCLA Medical School (1946), the West Los Angeles Medical Center addition (1959), the Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center addition (1954), and the Brentwood Division Administration Building for the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center addition (1946).

According to the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Santa Monica, the Orchard Tract where the subject property is located, was largely unimproved until the post-World War II era. At the time, Block 3, which also included the future site of the Santa Monica Doctors Building, was undeveloped with the exception of two single-family residences fronting Wilshire Boulevard and two single-family residences fronting 21st Street. The lots of the subject property were vacant.

The 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map illustrates the increase in building density after World War II; however, Lot 30, the site of the future Santa Monica Doctors Building, remained vacant. The subject property was the only vacant lot on the block. The block was developed with single-family residences facing 22nd Street and multi-family housing facing 21st Street.

The Santa Monica Doctors Building was constructed at 2125 Arizona across the street from St. John's Hospital. Based on City of Santa Monica building permits, the Santa Monica Doctors Building was constructed between 1950 and 1952 as a medical office building with fourteen suites for doctors, dentists, and a pharmacy. The original set of construction plans date from May 1946. An application for a new building was filed on May 5, 1947, and later another application for a new building with nearly identical information was re-filed on March 23, 1950. The building permits do not list an architect, only a structural engineer, Leslie A. Irvin, and a contractor, David Johnson.

The original owner was Edward J. Talley, the president of the Santa Monica Doctors Building, Incorporated. The building construction delay may have been due to the lack of financing at the end of World War II. The subject property does not appear on the 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of Santa Monica and the Tax Assessor lists the date of construction as 1952. Occupants of the subject property were first listed in the 1952-1953 Santa Monica City Directory.

The medical office building is a building type that developed in the twentieth century. As the population in Los Angeles and Santa Monica grew and the medical profession became

more specialized, the construction of medical office buildings increased. As described above, while hospitals were being constructed in Santa Monica, the construction of medical office buildings was also booming during the 1940s and 1950s. The number of medical office buildings constructed outweighed the construction of hospitals. Medical office buildings were cost effective to construct and often constructed adjacent to hospitals and commercial districts. They were designed in the latest architectural style with modern medical technology and automobile convenience.

Medical office buildings at 1148 4th Street (1936-1942) and the Santa Monica Medical Center at 1137 2nd Street (1941) were constructed near commercial districts. The medical office building at 1530 Arizona (1942) was constructed near the Santa Monica Hospital, and the medical office building at 2200-2202 Santa Monica Boulevard (1951) and the subject property, the Santa Monica Doctors Building, were constructed near Saint John's Hospital. As outlined in Attachment A, there are a number of other examples of medical office buildings constructed in Santa Monica during the 1940's and 1950's. This pattern of medical office building construction in the 1950s was also occurring in neighboring Los Angeles. The Santa Monica Doctors Building was designed during this period and is linked to the development of medical facilities in the Santa Monica Bay Area.

#### Architectural Significance: Streamline Moderne Commercial and Medical Buildings

Streamline Moderne commercial architecture was relatively common in Santa Monica during its period of significance from 1930 to 1950. One of the earliest commercial Streamline Moderne buildings in Santa Monica was Ralph's Grocery at 1301 3rd Street, designed by Morgan, Walls and Clements in 1935. The former J. C. Penny building at 1202 3rd Street, was designed by M. L. Anderson in 1948. Other Streamline Moderne commercial buildings constructed in Santa Monica were the Merle Norman Building, 2525 Main Street, (1936, Architect H. G. Thursby); City Hall, 1685 Main Street, (1938, Architect Donald Parkinson); Shangri-la Hotel, 1301 Ocean Avenue, (1940, Architect William E. Foster); Llo-da-mar Bowl, 507-517 Wilshire (1940, Architect W. Douglas Lee); and the Moderne Santa Monica Medical Center, 1137 2nd Street, (1941, Engineer W. D. Coffey). There are also a number of good examples in the City of the Streamline Moderne architectural style applied to multi-family housing from the 1930 to 1950.

The Santa Monica Doctors Building falls within the period of significance of Streamline Moderne architecture in Santa Monica. The subject property was designed in 1946, and constructed during the early 1950s. However, due to the characteristics of the property type, a medical office building, and the potential economic difficulties faced during its original construction, the Santa Monica Doctors Building does not exhibit the same level of architectural merit as other examples of commercial architecture in Santa Monica, but remains a good example of the style.

Research indicates that the Streamline Moderne architecture of the Santa Monica Doctors Building appears to have been influenced by the design of St. John's Hospital and Health Center (1942) directly to the south. A historic aerial view of the area shortly after its construction clearly shows that the Santa Monica Doctors Building was intended to relate

to the directly adjacent hospital one block to the south. The five-story, reinforced-concrete St. John's Hospital was designed by J. E. Loveless and constructed by Pozzo Construction Company in the Streamline Moderne style.

The Streamline Moderne style was most likely selected for St. John's Hospital and the Santa Monica Doctors Building in response to the influence of the European Hygienic Architecture movement, as well as prevailing architectural trends. Hygienic Architecture is a variant of the early Modern style originating in Europe that emphasized clean, minimalist functionalism and promoted the use of natural sunlight and fresh air to heal patients.

Turning away from traditional revival styles popular for hospitals during the early twentieth century, the design of St. John's Hospital placed an emphasis on the hospitals scientific foundation and functional operation. The building's clean, "hygienic" modern lines represented medicine's scientific application and efficient success in medical facilities.

The Streamline Moderne style of St. John's Hospital most likely influenced the massing and design of the Santa Monica Doctors Building. The architectural design elements of the Santa Monica Doctors Building appears to draw from the design features and massing of the original St. John's Hospital – with its rounded corners and projecting bays, horizontal bands, metal casement windows, setback towers, and stacked massing.

Even though subject property was not an extension of St. John's Hospital, the Santa Monica Doctors Building most likely drew from St. John's Streamline Moderne style for marketing purposes and to draw an allusion to a clean, "hygienic" and modern medical facility as was embodied in its larger neighbor directly to the south. The unifying Streamline Moderne style most likely appeared to strengthen the reputability and professionalism of the Santa Monica Doctors Building tenants, consisting of doctors and dentists, and visually symbolized the medical use inside.

As previously noted, while there are numerous examples of the medical office building property type from the 1940s and 1950s in Santa Monica, there are few medical office buildings in the Streamline Moderne style. Research to date indicates that there are three medical office buildings that are variants of the Moderne style in Santa Monica: the Art Deco Moderne medical office building (1936-1942) located at 1148 4th Street; the Moderne Santa Monica Medical Center (1941) with elements of the Regency style located at 1137 2nd Street; and the altered Streamline Moderne medical office building at 2200-2202 Santa Monica Boulevard (1951).

Therefore, because there are so few extant examples of Streamline Moderne style medical buildings in Santa Monica, the Santa Monica Doctors Building appears to be a rare example of a historical type, a Streamline Moderne medical office building. Furthermore, the building retains sufficient integrity of location, materials, design, and workmanship such that it continues to convey its significant associations with the City's historic development of medical facilities post WW-II and with an architectural design and property type from the City's past.

## Landmarks Ordinance/Findings

The Landmarks Ordinance (SMMC Chapter 9.36.100) requires the Commission to review the 2125 Arizona Avenue property for eligibility as a City Landmark based on the six criteria discussed below. The Commission may designate a property as a Landmark if it meets one or more of these criteria.

Based on the research and evaluation of Santa Monica Doctors Building located at 2125 Arizona Avenue, the appears to meet two designation criteria established in SMMC 9.36.100 and is therefore eligible for City Landmark designation. The following draft findings are made to support this conclusion:

- (1) *It exemplifies, symbolizes, or manifests elements of the cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history of the City.*

The Santa Monica Doctors Building, a Streamline Moderne medical office building designed in 1946 and constructed circa 1950-1952, manifests the cultural and economic history of Santa Monica in its historical type and architecture. The subject property is closely linked to the development of the medical office building type and larger medical facilities in the Santa Monica Bay Area in the 1940s and 1950s and manifests this period of the City's history. In 1942, Saint John's Hospital was constructed in Santa Monica and during the Post World War II era, medical facilities were constructed in Santa Monica and the region in response to population growth and public health needs, including the UCLA Medical School (1946), the Brentwood Division Administration Building for the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center addition (1946), St. John's Hospital addition (1949), and Santa Monica Hospital Medical Center addition (1954). The construction of medical office buildings occurred during the 1940s and 1950s in conjunction with the development of these larger medical facilities. Examples of medical office buildings constructed in Santa Monica include: the Art Deco Moderne medical office building (1936-1942) located at 1148 4<sup>th</sup> Street; the Moderne Santa Monica Medical Center (1941) with elements of the Regency style located at 1137 2nd Street; the Georgian Revival medical office building at 1530 Arizona (1942); and the Streamline Moderne medical office building at 2200-2202 Santa Monica Boulevard (1951). The construction of the Santa Monica Doctors Building falls within the development period of these medical office buildings and related health facilities and retain sufficient integrity to convey its significant historic associations. Even though subject property was not an extension of St. John's Hospital, the Santa Monica Doctors Building most likely drew from St. John's Streamline Moderne style for marketing purposes and to draw an allusion to a clean, "hygienic" and modern medical facility as it was embodied in the St. John's facility directly to the south. The unifying Streamline Moderne style most likely appeared to strengthen the reputability and professionalism of the Santa Monica Doctors Building tenants and visually symbolized the medical use inside. With respect to medical office buildings in Santa Monica, the subject property is the only example of a Streamline Moderne medical office building constructed adjacent to a prominent health facility. An aerial photograph shows that the siting, massing,

and architectural design of the Santa Monica Doctors Building clearly referenced the architecture of the adjacent Saint John's Hospital. As a result, the subject property is unique in exemplifying the cultural and economic history of the City of Santa Monica. Therefore, the subject property appears to satisfy this criterion.

- (2) *It has aesthetic or artistic interest or value, or other noteworthy interest or value.*

As an example of Streamline Moderne architecture the building does not fully articulate the key design elements of the idiom to express an ideal of the style. Specifically, the property's spatial arrangements, massing, fenestration, materials, and overall form, while functionally successful, do not reflect the deft aesthetic hand of a master designer. The subject property lacks sufficient aesthetic or architectural value necessary for designation.

- (3) *It is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history.*

Current research does not indicate that this resource is identified with historic personages or with important events in local, state or national history in local, state, or national history. Therefore, the resource does not appear to meet this criterion.

- (4) *It embodies distinguishing architectural characteristics valuable to a study of a period, style, method of construction, or the use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship, or is a unique or rare example of an architectural design, detail or historical type valuable to such a study.*

The Santa Monica Doctors Building is a rare, extant example of a historical property type in the City of Santa Monica: a Streamline Moderne style medical office building. It incorporates the massing, flat roof, overhanging eaves, stucco finish, metal casement fenestration, corner windows, and horizontality associated with Streamline Moderne architecture of the time period. Additionally, the subject property is one of four Moderne medical office buildings in Santa Monica: the Art Deco/Moderne medical office building (1936-1942), 1148 4<sup>th</sup> Street; the Streamline Moderne Santa Monica Medical Center with Regency style architectural elements, 1137 2nd Street (1941); and the Streamline Moderne medical office building, 2200-2202 Santa Monica Boulevard (1951). Therefore, the Santa Monica Doctors Building appears to satisfy this criterion as a rare, extant example of medical office building historical property type in the Streamline Moderne style.

- (5) *It is a significant or a representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.*

The resource does not appear to meet this criterion. The property is not a significant or representative example of the work or product of a notable builder, designer or architect.

- (6) *It has a unique location, a singular physical characteristic, or is an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.*

The resource does not appear to meet this criterion. At the time of construction, there was a visual relationship between the subject property and St. John's Hospital, but as a result of the expansion of St. John's Hospital the visual relationship was dissolved. Although the siting of the building and its relationship to the street corner is a unique architectural characteristic, the resource does not have a unique location, singular physical characteristic, and is not an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community or the City.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that the Landmarks Commission approve the Landmark Designation application for the commercial building located at 2125 Arizona Avenue because the property meets two of the designation criteria established in SMMC 9.36.100 and is therefore eligible for City Landmark designation. It is further recommended that the Commission designate the property commonly known as 2125 Arizona Avenue (Orchard Tract 199, on Block 3, Lot 30) as a Landmark Parcel in order to protect and safeguard the Landmark building.

Pursuant to SMMC 9.36.180, the Landmarks Commission's determination regarding this application may be appealed to the City Council if the appeal is filed with the City Planning Division within ten (10) consecutive days commencing from the date that the decision is made by the Landmarks Commission.

### Attachments:

- A. PCR Services Corporation Landmark Assessment Report, May 2009
- B. DPR Form
- C. Aerial Photo
- D. Public Notice
- E. Correspondence and Research Provided by the Property Owner
- F. Correspondence from Members of the Public